COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM
CONGRESSMAN TOM DAVIS, CHAIRMAN

N E W S   R E L E A S E

For Immediate Release   **Contact: David Marin**
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Davis, Shays Probe Air Cargo Security
Letter to Ridge Questions TSA's Air Cargo Strategic Plan

Washington, D.C. – House Government Reform Committee Chairman Tom Davis (R-VA) and National Security, Emerging Threats and International Relations Subcommittee Chairman Christopher Shays (R-CT) today sent a letter to Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge aimed at better understanding the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) strategy for screening cargo on passenger airliners. The letter raises a serious of questions about "specific concerns that relate to the strategic objectives" of TSA's "Air Cargo Strategic Plan."

A copy of the letter – which is part of the committee's ongoing oversight of TSA operations and airline security generally -- follows:

December 10, 2003

The Honorable Tom Ridge
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Mr. Secretary:

As you are aware, the Committee on Government Reform has been conducting extensive oversight into the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) operations, specifically airline passenger screening. During our November 20, 2003 hearing on TSA passenger screeners, several questions were raised concerning cargo on passenger airliners. As we work to ensure that passengers and carry-on baggage are properly screened, we must also examine the need to screen cargo.

Based upon intelligence from 2001, TSA estimated it is 35 to 65 percent likely that terrorists plan to place a bomb in cargo on passenger airplanes. It's unreasonable to expect these percentages to decrease if we continue to allow 2.8 million tons per year of unscreened cargo onboard passenger flights. While we understand that 100% screening of cargo on passenger planes is not a viable option at this time, it is imperative that TSA take calculated steps in determining the best way to protect the airlines and their passengers.

In October, the Aviation Security Advisory Committee (ASAC) issued its recommendations to TSA regarding air cargo security. Among ASAC's recommendations, was strengthening TSA's Known Shipper Program by comparing known shippers to government watch lists and verifying that all officers of known shipper companies are not listed on a government watch list. ASAC also recommended that TSA pursue further research into cargo screening technology with industry.

TSA has provided the Committee on Government Reform with its Air Cargo Strategic Plan ("Plan"). We understand that the Plan reflects ASAC's recommendations, as well as recommendations from the General Accounting Office and the Department of Transportation's Office of Inspector General. The Plan states that TSA is working to ensure that "100 percent of cargo that is deemed to be of elevated risk is inspected and ensuring that the entire air cargo supply chain is secure." While the Committee finds this statement encouraging, we have specific concerns that relate to the strategic objectives of the Plan that relate specifically to cargo on passenger airliners. Accordingly, pursuant to Rules X and XI of the U.S. House of Representatives, please provide the following information to the Committee by January 5, 2003.

1. In order to enhance shipper and supply chain security, TSA's Plan states that TSA will use a more thorough vetting of shippers applying for the Known Shipper Program and Indirect Air Carriers (IACs) applying for validation. The data submitted as part of the Known Shipper program and IAC validation/ revalidation programs will be centralized so that it can be verified and compared to terrorist intelligence. Please provide a description of how this data centralization will work, specifically explaining:

   a. Which office within TSA will be responsible for the centralization of shipper and IAC data;

   b. What steps TSA will take to verify the shipper and IAC data; and

   c. Which relevant government watch lists will be used when comparing information provided by shippers and IACs to terrorist intelligence.

2. The Plan states that TSA will develop new training programs as part of the standard security programs employed by industry. Please explain specifically:

   a. The new training programs TSA will be developing;

   b. How TSA's new training programs will serve to enhance shipper and supply chain security; and

   c. The standard security programs employed by industry.

3. The Plan states that TSA will improve compliance enforcement through a strengthened field inspection presence, in order to enhance shipper and supply chain security. Please provide a detailed explanation as to the steps TSA will take to strengthen its field inspection presence.

4. In order to enhance shipper and supply chain security, the Plan states that TSA will explore the applicability of the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (C-TPAT). Please identify specifically:

   a. If, aside from the Known Shipper program, there are any other TSA programs that could be aided by exploring the applicability of C-TPAT;

   b. The steps TSA is taking to explore the applicability of C-TPAT; and

   c. How TSA is coordinating with CBP to further explore the applicability of C-TPAT.

5. In order to identify elevated risk cargo through prescreening, TSA's Plan states that TSA will implement a Cargo Prescreening System that will develop a risk score for shipments using shipment data, information from the Known Shipper Program, and IAC databases. Please explain in detail:

   a. The tools TSA plans to use in developing the risk scores for shipments;

   b. How TSA plans to implement the Cargo Prescreening System;

   c. Which office within TSA will be responsible for the implementation of the Cargo Prescreening System; and

   d. The timeframe for the Cargo Prescreening System to be fully operational.

6. The Plan states that TSA is committed to the use of technology to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of inspecting air cargo. TSA will conduct pilot projects to study the applicability of current and emerging non-intrusive inspection technologies for air cargo. Please identify specifically each pilot project, the cost, and timeframe for implementation.

7. As part of its plan to screen 100% of high-risk cargo, TSA has stated it will utilize Explosive Detection Systems (EDS), Explosive Trace Detection (ETD), and canine teams. Please provide detailed information as to how the EDS, ETD, and canine teams will be utilized for screening high-risk cargo.

8. In November 2003, TSA issued security directives that require random inspection of air cargo on passenger aircraft on flights within, into, and out of the United States. The inspections are to be conducted by the air carrier, with TSA ensuring that the inspections are conducted properly. Please provide the following information:

   a. The airports that will take part in the random inspections of air cargo;

   b. The guidelines given to the air carriers as to how to conduct random inspections;

   c. The technology and tools the air carriers are to use in conducting the random inspections;

   d. The timeframe for conducting the random inspections; and

   e. The protocol in place if prohibited items are discovered inside of air cargo.

   Finally, we request that TSA provide to Committee staff a briefing covering the details of the current Known Shipper Program, as well as Strategic Objectives #1 through 3 of TSA's Air Cargo Strategic Plan.

Sincerely,

Tom Davis
Chairman

Christopher Shays
Chairman, Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations

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